

Changemaking Toolkit 2026

Safety, Dignity, and Economic Security

Addressing the Intersection of Poverty and Violence Against Women in Rural Communities

Part 2: Recommendations for Policy Makers

Huronia Transition Homes

Huronia Transition Homes

... working to end all violence against all women



About Us

Huronia Transition Homes (HTH) is a charitable organization that has operated across Simcoe County since 1984.

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Our Mission

We believe that all violence against all women and children must end. We are community members who are committed to education, advocacy, harm reduction, and poverty reduction as a means to end violence. Huronia Transition Homes is also committed to providing shelter and support to abused women and their children and to providing counselling to women survivors of sexual assault and socioeconomic opportunities through social enterprise.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS



DEMANDS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

HURONIA TRANSITION HOMES

Purpose of the toolkit

This systems change toolkit equips the North Simcoe Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) Network, advocates, organizations, and allies to advance structural change at the intersection of violence against women and poverty, grounded in women's lived experience and feminist trauma-informed practice. It translates evidence from Huronia Transition Homes' research project (funded by Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) into clear demands, systems change strategies, and messaging tools to support coordinated action across systems.



What's in the toolkit

This toolkit is divided into 3 parts:

1. **Awareness:**
   - Self-care in advocacy
   - HTH Research Project
   - Key Messages
   - Dignity Based Systems Change
   - Policy Position:
     BIG as violence prevention
     and essential element of dignity-based systems change
2. **Recommendations for Policy Makers**
3. **Calls to action**
   - how YOU can make a difference!
   - Resource List
   - Get Connected

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1 / Adopt and implement a Basic Income Guarantee as a core anti-violence and anti-poverty measure

Demands

That the Government of Canada, Province of Ontario, the County of Simcoe, and all of its muncipalities adopt and implement a Basic Income Guarantee that is unconditional, individualized, and adequate to meet basic needs; as a foundational element of gender-based violence prevention, poverty reduction, dignity, and economic justice.

The Government of Canada must implement Call to Justice 4.5: “Establish a guaranteed annual livable income for all Canadians.”

Why this matters

- The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals makes clear the need to address root causes of and vulnerability to violence by addressing human and economic security.
- Stable income increases women’s capacity to leave violence, make autonomous decisions, and plan for long-term stability.
- Economic abuse operates through benefit sabotage, creation of debt without consent, credit damage, and bureaucratic manipulation. Income security directly interrupts these mechanisms.
- A Basic Income Guarantee must be embedded within broader systemic reforms that address gendered, racial, disability, and colonial inequities, ensuring women can access adequate services, housing, safety, and supports without surveillance or punitive conditions.

2 / Centre women's lived experience in system design to advance cross-sector substantive equality

Demands

- That the Government of Canda, Province of Ontario, Indigenous governance systems, County of Simcoe, and all of its municipalities build systems with women, not around them, embedding lived experience as expertise and strengthening cross-sector coordination so redesigned policies, programs, and services do not reproduce gendered, racial, disability, and colonial inequities, but instead achieve sustantive gender equality.
- That provincial ministries, the County of Simcoe, municipalities within Simcoe County (and across the Province of Ontario), service providers, and non-profit organizations create lived-experience advisory groups, drop-ins, and other accessible engagement spaces to guide policy development, project planning, and service design. Participation must be safe and accessible, including paid participation, childcare, transportation, trauma-informed facilitation, and ethical protections.

Why this matters

- Women are experts in how systems succeed and fail because they live the consequences of inadequate systems every day. Centering women's lived experience leads to policies and services that are more responsive, effective, and less likely to reproduce the surveillance, dependency, and harm women identified throughout this research.
- Violence, poverty, disability, racism, colonialism, immigration precarity, and rural isolation do not occur in separate systems. When women's voices guide cross-sector reform, governments and service providers can better address these interconnected realities, reducing the burden on women to navigate fragmented systems and creating pathways to safety, dignity, long-term stability, and sustantive equality.

3 / Move from crisis response to prevention, integrating solutions to poverty reduction and violence prevention

Demands

- That the Government of Canada and Province of Ontario develop and implement integrated Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Poverty Reduction Action Plans that address violence, poverty, housing insecurity, trauma, colonialism, racism, disability, and gender inequality as interconnected issues, from a feminist, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, decolonial, and trauma-informed perspective.
- That the County of Simcoe, and all of its municipalities embed gender-based violence prevention, poverty reduction, housing security, and community safety and wellbeing planning within a coordinated framework that prioritizes prevention, economic security, life stabilization, and systems accountability, and decolonization.
- Planning must be informed by women's lived experience and include Indigenous, racialized, disabled, rural, and low-income women from the outset, not as an afterthought.

Why this matters

- Women told us that violence and poverty cannot be separated. Violence creates poverty through economic abuse, lost income, coerced debt, housing instability, and trauma, while poverty limits women's ability to leave unsafe situations and rebuild their lives.
- Current systems treat poverty, housing, health, community safety, and gender-based violence as separate issues, forcing women to navigate fragmented services and carry the burden of coordination themselves.
- Community Safety and Wellbeing Plans increasingly identify housing, mental health, addictions, and access to services as priorities, yet gender-based violence and poverty are often addressed separately or omitted entirely. Integrating these issues creates a stronger foundation for prevention rather than crisis response.

4 / Strengthen access to safe, affordable, accessible, and *supportive* housing

Demands

- That the Government of Canda, Province of Ontario, Indigenous governance systems, County of Simcoe, and all of its municipalities recognize supportive housing as a critical component of violence prevention and expand dedicated affordable housing options for women experiencing violence and poverty, including guaranteed allocations within municipal and non-profit housing.
- That the County of Simcoe allow priority placement on housing waitlists for women leaving abusive relationships and remove income, credit, household status, and documentation barriers that currently disqualify women from safety.
- That the Government of Canda, Province of Ontario, and County of Simcoe fund transitional, supportive, accessible and affordable housing models that combine trauma-informed supports, optional financial planning assistance, childcare, service navigation, and needs-first standards across all housing services.
- That the Province of Ontario and County of Simcoe develop safe-landlord certification programs with oversight to prevent exploitation, harassment, unsafe conditions, and discrimination against women seeking safety.

Why this matters

- Women told us that unsafe, unaffordable, inaccessible or unsupportive housing can force women to remain in or return to violence for survival.
- Housing is not only a shelter issue; it is a prevention strategy that creates the stability women need to heal, work, parent, access services, and make decisions without coercion.

5 / Fund feminist, trauma-informed, low-barrier services led by Violence Against Women and Indigenous Women's organizations

Demands

- That the Government of Canda, Province of Ontario, Indigenous governance systems, County of Simcoe, and all of its municipalities fund and scale feminist trauma-informed, low-barrier services designed with women and led by Indigenous women's or Violence Against Women organizations; recognizing these organizations as experts in violence prevention and response and critical social infrastructure.
- Provide ongoing, sustainable operational funding so feminist and Indigenous women's organizations can deliver consistent services that meet women with respect, choice, and practical low-barrier support.

Why this matters

- Trauma is often framed as an individual deficit rather than a predictable response to violence and systemic harm. This leads to services that prioritize compliance over responsiveness, dignity, and choice.
- Supporting women with trauma-informed low-barrier services offers women space to heal, stabilize their lives, and empower themselves.

What feminist trauma-informed practice means

- Recognizes and challenges systems of power, gender, and structural inequity
- Centres women's lived experience as expertise
- Prioritizes autonomy, choice, and safety
- Reduces surveillance, documentation burden, and re-traumatization
- Strengthens benefits navigation and rights-based advocacy so women understand their entitlements and can challenge punitive decisions.
- Builds integrated service pathways between courts, shelters, benefits offices, housing services, legal supports, healthcare, child welfare, community programs, entrepreneurship and employment.

6 / Reduce the gendered burden of system navigation

Demands

- That the Government of Canda, Province of Ontario, Indigenous governance systems, County of Simcoe, and all of its municipalities create centralized service hubs housed within feminist, anti-oppressive, trauma-informed Violence Against Women and Indigenous women's organizations. Fund service navigators so women do not need to retell their stories, travel to multiple locations, or coordinate fragmented systems alone.
- That the County of Simcoe, and all of its municipalities expand transportation supports, including rural bus passes, subsidies, rides, and flexible transportation funding, to improve access to work, appointments, childcare, housing, legal supports, trauma-informed, and cultural services.
- That the Government of Canda and its service providers including the Canada Revenue Agency and Service Canada; the Province of Ontario and its Ministries including the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services and all of its service branches, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of the Attorney General; and the County of Simcoe including Ontario Works, recognize navigation as gendered labour and redesign services to reduce administrative hurdles, repetitive disclosure, documentation burden, and travel requirements. Further, that each of these entities provide trauma informed training to their leaders and staff on the intersections of violence, poverty, rurality, colonialism, racism, and ableism, and the impacts of navigation burden.

Why this matters

- Women carry an unpaid burden of coordinating fragmented systems (forms, appointments, travel, repeated disclosure). This navigation labour is gendered, intensified by rural service dispersion and transportation barriers, and compounded for Indigenous women, women of colour, newcomers, and women with disabilities.

7 / Explicitly recognize and respond to economic abuse to expand eligibility for housing and social support systems

Demands

- That the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services (including ODSP leaders and services providers), the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the County of Simcoe (including Community Support and Wellbeing and Housing teams) amend housing, income support, and service eligibility guidelines and program rules to explicitly recognize economic abuse and coercive control as forms of gender-based violence, and respond through a trauma-informed lens.
- That the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services adequately fund Violence Against Women Coordinating Committees across Ontario to expand their capacity to develop cross-sector protocols for responding to economic abuse by ODSP, OW, and GIS, and GAINS; housing systems; police legal, and justice services; and social, community, and cultural supports.
- That the Ministries of the Attorney General, Children, Community, and Social Services, Health, and Municipal Affairs and Housing, train judges, crown attorneys, legal aid workers, caseworkers, police, legal professionals, court staff, OW and ODSP leaders and workers, housing workers, doctors, nurses, clerks, and medical professionals, administrative staff, and leaders, and service providers on economic abuse indicators, coercive control, trauma-informed practice, and safe documentation.

Why this matters

- Women described partners controlling income, creating debt, damaging credit, interfering with benefits, and using systems to extend control after separation.
- When systems fail to recognize economic abuse, women are blamed or disqualified for harms created by violence, making justice, safety, support, housing, and medical care harder to reach.

8 / Redesign income supports to promote autonomy and reduce conditionality

Demands

- That the Government of Canada (including the CRA and Service Canada) and the Province of Ontario (including the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services) redesign income supports to provide individualized benefits, raise rates to meet basic needs, remove punitive claw backs, reduce surveillance, and address disability recognition gaps, especially where disability is connected to trauma, violence, mental health, or chronic pain.

Why this matters

- Conditional benefits, claw backs, and repeated proof requirements reproduce dependency and control, especially for women leaving violence.
- Current OW, ODSP, OAS, GIS, and GAINS amounts are inadequate to meet basic needs. Income supports should stabilize women's lives, not force them to choose between work, safety, caregiving, healing, and survival.

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9 / Expand eligibility for Disability Tax Credit and provide adequate Canada Disability Benefit

Demands

That the Government of Canada:

- Continue to expand eligibility for the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) by reducing eligibility barriers, particularly for mental health and trauma related conditions.
- Recognize the links between disability and violence; that violence is the leading cause of disability amongst women in Canada (DAWN, 2024) and that people with disabilities are 50-100% more likely to experience abuse by a partner and four times (4x) more likely to experience sexual assault (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2024).
- Provide training for Canada Revenue Agency staff on the links between violence, disability, and poverty.
- Continue to reduce barriers to accessing the DTC by streamlining the process with Provinces. Create automatic eligibility for the DTC for those who qualify for ODSP.

Why this matters

- When disability systems do not recognize trauma-related and episodic conditions, women are left without the income security needed to heal, leave unsafe situations, access care, and rebuild stability.
- The DTC is more than a tax measure; it is a gateway to other disability supports, including the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB). When eligibility is too narrow, complex, or dependent on medical documentation that is hard to access, the women most affected by violence and poverty are often excluded from the very supports designed to reduce poverty.
- Expanding eligibility and improving access would reduce administrative burden, repeated proof requirements, and the need for women to prove the legitimacy of trauma, pain, mental health impacts, or disability over and over again.
- An adequate CDB is essential to dignity-based systems change. Disability income supports must be high enough to reduce poverty, support autonomy, and ensure that women and survivors are not forced to choose between safety, food, housing, medication, transportation, caregiving, and healing.

10 / Fund Indigenous culturally grounded supports and remove colonial barriers, including removal of sex-based dicrimination from the *Indian Act*

Demands

- That the Government of Canada amend discriminatory laws and policies, including ss.2(6) of the *Indian Act*, that limit safety, status rights, housing, income, and access to supports.
- That the Government of Canada increase sustained funding for Indigenous-Governance, Indigenous led programming, cultural supports, and Indigenous women's organizations.
- That the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, the County of Simcoe and all of its Municipalities partner with Indiegnous leaders, organizations, and governance systems to embed Indigenous worldviews, practices, and healing approaches into programs and service design.
- That the Government of Canada Implement without delay all 231 Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and all 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Why this matters

- Women told us that colonial policies and discriminatory practices continue to restrict access to status, supports, safety, and belonging.
- Safety requires self-determination, culturally grounded care, and systems that stop reproducing colonial harm.

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